

Evolution of the production systems of the endangered cattle breed Mirandesa: Threats and alternatives for family-farm systems

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Family-farm systems are largely dominant in the rural communities of northeastern Portugal. Familiar farming systems can be organized based on the interrelations and the diversity of its characteristics such as farmer's age, farm dimension, external resources, productive orientation, or livestock type and number.

A significant number of the regional family-farm systems raise Mirandesa cows, a local cattle breed classified as endangered in 1994. Since 1995 the Mirandesa veal enjoys a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) in northeastern Portugal. The carcasses of weaning calves, that aren't PDO, are currently paid 4 €/kg. The PDO producers receive 5,25€/Kg, a 31% higher premium price.

During the past 15 years, the number of family-farms decreased 64% (from 1465 in 1996 to 501 in 2008), and the number of breeding cows decreased 3.7% (4358 in 1996, to 4198 in 2008). The most resilient farms, practice a traditional production mode, with 3 to 10 cows average per farm. On these farms the gross margin for calf was in 1999, 50% higher than in more specialized farms (>10 cows). However, the number of more intensive is rapidly growing.

The PDO success is associated to the recent cereal prices collapse. It provided an opportunity to increase the livestock density and specialization in beef production, hanging the cow feeds on oat forage. A density of 0.3 - 0.5LSU/ha on the pasture areas, increased to 1.5-2LSU/ha. The intermediate consumptions of the production system, concentrated feeding, fertilizers and diesel had an inflation rate between 40% and 70%, in the period 2006-2011. These agriculture systems now give signs of rupture. Competitiveness of the Mirandesa cattle production system in the future depends on the conversion of former cultivated areas into pastures and on the introduction of a new land management that promotes a higher cooperation/integration of the family-farm systems.

New Challenges for Family Farming Systems

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Family farming depends heavily on flexible and available family labour. During the last decades, though, sideline activities of farmers have considerably become more important in terms of income generation but also in terms of personal interests. Increasingly, the availability of family labour on farms is becoming a challenge for the farms.

In this study, focus has been put on the labour of women who still represent the largest proportion of (unpaid) family labour units in agriculture in Switzerland. If the labour of women decreases further in agriculture, what happens to our family farm systems? Is it realistic to go promote sustainable production systems without women?

The study draws on the comparative analysis of agricultural households with and without women on the data from Research Station ART's 3372 FADN farms, of which 182 (5%) are womanless households. Thereby it is important to state that the single male farmers are to be found in all of the farming zones in Switzerland, in the mountain regions as well as in the lowlands and they tend to be rather newcomers than drop-outs from agriculture: 45% of single male farmers are under forty years of age, and 81% are under fifty.

It shows differences between the farm managements between the farmers working together with and without women (partners, mothers) and looks at the overall ecological and economic consequences of this structural development in Switzerland.

farmers to consumers. We will also look at the consequences of it for the farm management and especially the inclusion or not of “nature care” grazing practices.

Does growth hurt? Resilience of farms in growing local organic food networks

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Marketing organic products locally with close consumer-producer relationships has been suggested to foster sustainable development of the food chain in numerous ways. However, the volume of products is small as well as the number of farmers and consumers involved. Also, there is a lack of knowledge on how farms are affected when local organic food networks grow in scale and output.

This paper presents preliminary findings of research exploring growing local organic food chains and how the farms in these chains are affected in terms of social-ecological resilience. Resilience is the capacity to deal successfully with change and is a systemic approach to the assessment of farming systems. Two cases are studied in-depth. The first case is an organic vegetable subscription system (“box-scheme”) outside Vienna, Austria, and the second case is a farmer cooperative that created a label of organic, local beef in Uppland, Sweden. First results indicate that growth leads to changes and restructuring of the networks, influencing resilience and the relationship with consumers. In both cases there was an ambition to have direct contact and communication with end consumers, and growth of the networks influenced this ambition in different ways. In the Austrian case producers that could provide larger quantities became more important in the network and could therefore stay well in contact with end consumers. On the other hand, diversified and/or small-scale producers had to make an effort to find new connections with consumers. In the Swedish case, growth led to challenges in the wholesale part of the food chain. The butcheries used by the network could not deliver directly to the supermarkets, and the middleman who could, was not able to declare from what farm each piece of meat came. Thus, the label could not communicate with end consumers as well as the network would have liked.

Mirandesa meat PDO: The strategies of family-farm systems for their governance

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Mirandesa Meat, is one PDO (since 1995), that has for production region a small area from the northeast of Portugal far away from the great centers of consumption. The producers are 316, from which 180 formed a group producers (cooperative) that manages the PDO. All are organized in family-farm systems. Most, develop poli-cultural production systems, are retired or with multiple sources of income, and explore a small number of cows (average of 8 cows).

Over 90% of the production is sold in big population centres, with higher social stratification, localized more than 250Km from the production region.

With the consumers far away from the local production, the strategy of these producers after organized were based on three pillars: interactive communication through promotion and direct sales in fairs, progression in the value chain through product differentiation and valuing the certified dimension through the PDO and the recognition of Mirandesa meat derivatives like the example of Mirandesa sausage, a Slow food presidia.

The interactive communication between producers and consumers, in this context, becomes more vital as more distant producers and consumers are, once the latter lose direct control on the

production and sale of food. For small producers it's vital the utilization of different kinds of certification, because through their utilization they have the possibility to positively differentiate on the market.

The PDO Carne Mirandesa, has all its production sold since 1998. In the year 2010 it sold 268t from 1960 carcasses. Nationally, it's the PDO that pays the highest value to producers (5.25€/Kg). In the production region, the carcasses of the same type that aren't PDO, are paid an average price of 4€/Kg, being observed a 31% difference.

The paper, analyses the strategy of approaching the producers and consumers by allowing the first a fair valuation of the product and the latter have more information and greater security in choice

Exploring the role of consumers as drivers of agri-food networks: contexts, beliefs, and governance

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The study suggests that governance of the short circuits is characterized by constitutional processes (Grandori, 2010) which are aimed at instituting polycentric systems. The analysis conceptualizes the food networks as contexts (Dilley, 2002) of systems of socio-economic relationships and recognizes that cultural constructs have a prominent role in the dynamics of the economic systems via the institutional dimensions and the collective action framed by policy. The context interaction is thus thought of as a driver of governance of the system of producers-consumers relationships. An empirical analysis is proposed which concerns with the governance of purchasing group organizations (GPOs). Four typical case studies (Seawright, Gerring, 2008) are proposed - GasTezio (Perugia, Central Italy), Gasp (Arezzo, Central Italy), BioAcquisti (Spoleto, Central Italy), Gas Ricorboli Solidale (Florence, Central Italy) - in order to corroborate the hypothesis that polycentric governance systems are achieved by through constitutional processes aimed at achieving a horizontal distribution of critical decisions rights (Gerring, 2004). The research questions are derived from the analytical framework and concern decision rights distribution among the participants of each. The case study constructs were developed in accordance with these research questions. Criteria for identifying case study typology were identified in parallel to constructs building (van Duren et al., 2003). Case studies are carried out by interviews and document analysis. The relationship between case studies and the theoretical hypothesis proposed is identified within the framework provided by Yin (1994). The analytical generalization method was applied, in which a previously developed theory is used as a template for comparing the empirical evidence from case studies (Yin, 1994, p.31) and in which results are generalized into theory.

Co-producing cultural coherency

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Since the 1960s, modernization and specialisation of agricultural food production caused and still causes a loss in the socio-economic and ecological performance of the rural as a productive natural resource base. From an agro-ecological departure point we study collective forms of food governance as 'laboratories' in which cultural coherency is co-produced between consumers and producers. More in particular, we analyse how initiatives of both producers and consumers contribute on the re-organisation of the relations between nature and society. In this paper we present the preliminary results of a survey held among newly emerging consumer initiatives in Spain. In our analysis we focus on their socio-ecological and economic 'configuration' and assess the impact of these forms of civic